

McGuckin Update: Dealing with all the Hype

Report by J.J. Johnson 06.15.01

It's a common occurrence for rumors to surface when lack of information persists. To challenge this phenomenon, JoAnn McGuckin's attorney, Bryce Powell, contacted Sierra Times Thursday to set the record straight.

Powell, age 30, is a graduate of the University of Idaho. He raised two children in Sandpoint with his wife. He has been practicing law in the Northern Idaho Area for four years.

In the interview, Powell answered many questions that have been asked by many in the media and the local community. "I've lived here all of my life, and love this community," Powell said. He agreed that much of what was reported by the media was misconstrued based on the local culture.

Powell stated to Sierra Times that the lack of public access to his client, JoAnn McGuckin, was her choice, and that she was in fact asked to consider making statements to the public. "We have had thousands of requests for interviews, a flood of support, and offers of assistance," Powell said "But JoAnn has decided to work through only a few people to get this matter resolved." Powell did state that once the matter has been resolved, "She will talk to the media." The exact manner in which that will take place is undetermined at this time. As of now, "She wants to remain focused."

Among the reasons for JoAnn's avoidance of the general public is due to her recuperating from her illness and trauma that stemmed in part, from her arrest. "When I first came to see her, it took two deputies to help her to her feet," Powell insisted. "She was not doing well." He reported that as time has moved on, she has grown healthier by the day. It seems the recent visit of her six children helped.

Powell stated that her visitation list is very short and private, but she has had visitors outside of her court appointed attorney. There is a list of authorized visitors at the Bonner County Jail for JoAnn McGuckin, Sierra Times has learned, but that list remains private by the wishes of both McGuckin and the jail.

Powell was personally disturbed by many allegations that have surfaced. One stated that, "...JoAnn's case is being continued once again, but now it appears she is in love..."

"Many folks apparently witnessed the appearance of them [JoAnn & Powell] behaving like love struck teenagers....And JoAnn is very subdued and appears drugged," said one report which has made its way around the Internet.

Powell did confirm he may have been seen holding hands with JoAnn McGuckin during the litigation to drop the charges against her. He also stated that "All JoAnn's medical needs are being looked after." Powell was clearly disturbed by these false allegations.

"Attorneys holding hands with clients is not uncommon," said attorney Nancy Johnson. "It's an intense time, and sometimes working closely together in life threatening situations with a client creates a certain type of bond." Powell stated that his mission is to have all the charges dropped.

When questioned by Sierra Times about the June 12 rally JoAnn Sandpoint, Idaho Powell said it was unknown exactly who staged the rally, but Edgar Steele was presumed responsible since JoAnn had access to him while in custody.

When made aware of the fact that Steele in fact did not call the "Rally for the Family" (as it was first described on the FreeRepublic.com,) Powell said that it wasn't the 'image' that JoAnn wanted. "JoAnn doesn't want other people latching on to her situation for other reasons." JoAnn does not want to be a poster child. "She is focused on regaining custody of her children, a roof over her head for her and her children, and getting this matter behind her," Powell said.

Powell stated that her decision to address the media (and the rally participants) was done at the courthouse, and not while in the jail.

In contrast, Edgar J. Steele, who helped bring the McGuckin matter to the national spotlight during the initial standoff between the Bonner County Sheriff's office and the six McGuckin children, defended himself against many of the allegations laid against him.

Steele lashed back at a local radio station Thursday over false allegations made by county officials. "No, I did not orchestrate the media campaign against you and other county officials. No, I had nothing to do with that demonstration out front on Monday. Wish I could take credit for both, but I simply don't have that sort of influence, despite what [county officials] might think," Steele stated in a public letter to the Bonner County Commissioners.

Steele continues to lead the charge of many that JoAnn McGuckin still remains in custody, and that her legal defense refuses to push for her immediate release, and to refute the charges against her publicly. County Commissioners on local media accuse much of the 'hype' on lawyers "basking in the glow of media attention," and so-called "right-wing extremists."

But concerns over the welfare of the McGuckin family crossed political boundaries. Sierra Times has received statements from several persons who insist they are not 'conservative' but are concerned about how government officials can take such actions, and make such allegations against a family and not be held accountable.

Powell recognizes that Northern Idaho is watching the case but he is surprised at the sudden media attention that he has received. He says he is working in the best interests of his client.

Nancy Johnson, a patent attorney with broad court litigation and negotiating experience, understands the shield from the media during a negotiating phase of a court matter. "When negotiating for a deal, there is always compromise. There are phone calls, motions filed, and consultation with judges." Johnson stated. "It can be a professionally hostile environment, and in many cases keeping details out of public view may not satisfy media

appetite, but is only done in the best interest of the client." Johnson says taking the battle to the media is warranted at times, but "can sometimes push a prosecutor into a corner, forcing them to stand their ground in the public view."

"After all, they're politicians who need the support of many," Johnson said. "In this case, the defense attorney only needs one vote - that of his client."

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